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IN RELATION TO

The present condition of the naval defences and supplies, and the propriety and extent of their augmentation, and the amount of expenditure necessary for that object.

JANUARY 28, 1846.

Submitted, and ordered to be printed.

ROOM OF COMMITTEE ON NAVAL AFFAIRS FOR THE SENATE,
December 22, 1845.

SIR: I am directed by the Committee on Naval Affairs for the Senate to submit to you the following inquiries, and to solicit answers as early as may be found practicable and convenient :

1. What is the present number of vessels-of-war afloat, (distinguishing between sail and steam vessels,) their force, condition, and employment; the number, intended force, &c., of ships on the stocks; and what time would be required to put them afloat?

2. What is the quantity and condition of the naval supplies now on hand? and is not an increase of them necessary? and if so, to what extent, "to the efficient operations of the navy, and to its preservation and augmentation?"

3. Is it the opinion of the department that, in view of the present condition of the navy, and of our foreign relations, an augmentation of our naval force is necessary for the defence of our coast and the protection of our commerce, "and for any service the exigencies of the country may probably require?"

4. And if so, in what should that augmentation consist? how should it be effected? and what would be the probable expense of it?

Any views of the department, though not particularly called for by the foregoing inquiries, which may be regarded as within their scope, and promotive of their design, the committee would be pleased to have communicated.

With the highest respect, your most obedient servant,

JOHN FAIRFIELD,

Chairman of Committee on Naval Affairs.

HON. GEORGE BANCROFT,

Secretary of the Navy.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
January 8, 1846.

SIR: In reply to the inquiries proposed in your letter of the 22d ultimo, I have the honor to enclose to you a very full report from the heads of bureaus of this department.

Bitchie & Heiss, print.

Although the naval preparations of commercial nations, which are struggling to maintain themselves in an unnatural position of greatness, is no criterion for a country like ours, which seeks only the occupation and defence of its own territory, the protection of its citizens and their interests, and the development of its own resources; and although the existing naval establishment of the United States appears sufficient in all but sea going steamers for a condition of ascertained and undisturbed peace, yet, the present aspect of our foreign relations makes it a duty to suggest to the Committee on Naval Affairs the propriety of greater preparations than the ordinary annual appropriations contemplate.

These greater preparations should consist, as far as possible, of such expenditures as will be but anticipations of what, at an early day, would be required, even in case of the establishment of harmony with all nations.

They should consist, first, of an accumulation of naval materials and stores necessary for the rapid equipment of the vessels which are afloat, for such of those on the stocks as it may be desirable to employ, and for such others as Congress may authorize to be built. If means are granted, immediate measures can be adopted for the collection of such materials and stores; and the early purchase of many of them would be but an anticipation of what would soon be required for ordinary expenditures.

The second branch of expense that should at once be authorized, at the discretion of the President, should be the repair and equipment of all the vessels in ordinary, and of the frigates and sloops on the stocks. Were such authority and means granted, the President could exercise a more free judgment in the selection of vessels for immediate preparation, whilst the actual expenditure could be limited to existing urgencies for the vessels, and unprofitable outlays be avoided, if peace should continue.

It is also advisable that the limitation heretofore imposed on enlistments in the navy, by which the number is confined to 7,500 seamen, be suspended for a definite period, and that further enlistments be authorized and provided for.

It is further proper, even in the event of peace, to increase our sea-going steamers. At present, the United States have but two—the Mississippi and the Princeton—that can cruise at sea. I would recommend that authority be granted for the construction of three steam frigates, five steam-sloops, and two steamers of a smaller class. Such an increase would not be disproportionate to our resources or wants in a time of profound tranquillity.

It will also become necessary to increase the ordnance and ordnance stores. This, again, would be but an anticipation of expense which, at an early day, must in any contingency be required.

A system of steamers for harbor defence, to be thoroughly effectual, would involve the necessity of a fleet of steamers for each harbor in the country. The enormous expense would be further increased by the annual repairs, which would require a repetition of the whole outlay once in seven or eight years. It is still further to be considered that these steamers, being only for harbors and coasts, would, in time of peace, prove a costly burden, without an adequate equivalent. In the event of war, the immediate employment of mercantile ships and steamers, for the defence of ports, in co-operation with resident citizens, would be attended with a less aggregate cost; and the fertility of invention, and activity of patri-

otism, would, as danger approached, be quickened to devise methods of defence, which, though somewhat irregular, would prove effective, till a force could be organized suited to the emergency.

Inquiries are now making into the capacity of our mercantile steamers for being thus employed, and the result shall be communicated to you so soon as received.

The danger to be apprehended from inroads upon our territory by hostile fleets will be greatly diminished by the disasters consequent on storms; the necessity of frequent returns to port for supplies of provisions and water; the superadded want to steamships of fuel; the general inaccessibility of the coast, from shallowness of water; the certainty of vigorous resistance on the part of our citizens in the more densely peopled regions; and the uselessness of naval attacks on a sparsely settled coast for any permanent influence on the issue of a war. These circumstances have, in all times past, made great naval expeditions almost fruitless of results against remote settlements on land.

The measures recommended, if adopted, will not involve useless expense, even on the continuance of tranquillity, and seem to be sufficient as precautionary against any contingency that is likely to occur, and as preliminary to a more extended organization in the event it should become necessary. It will place the navy in a condition to inspire respect, to render aid in protecting our commerce, and to contribute effectively towards the preservation of peace.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
GEORGE BANCROFT.

Hon. JOHN FAIRFIELD,

Chairman of the Naval Committee of the Senate.

